

DRAFT MARCH , 2008 Presented to the NFLPA Player Representatives
By Jean S. Fugett, Jr., President of the Retired Players Steering Committee

In Washington, DC at CIA headquarters they have a wall with stars but no names. As you learn our history, you learn there is honor but no glory being a player rep.

A moment of silence for those who have gone before us as player reps in the national football league especially those whose who sacrificed their careers for their teammates NFLPA. Those that got cut and released with no pay, no annuity, no 401K and no health insurance. So we too could have such a wall.
All their stories have yet to be told.

If they could be here today, and I feel that spiritually, they really are here living through you and me. Like Gene said, we have and had the best leaders in the game.

On behalf of our democratically elected membership, we want to thank Troy Vincent your past President, the Executive Committee, Gene Upshaw our Executive Director, Clark Gaines both my leaders for a long time; and
As a tight end, I usually don't get along with linebackers but I must admit I love and want to thank Andre Collins, who has been there 24/7 for retired players. I know of many cases where players in dire need got help immediately thanks to Andre and the Professional Athlete Trust or PAT. Was this amount included in how you give back?

We all want to thank you for Andre and his department. I don't know if the retired players dept budget was in that number where you give back but that money needs to be counted too! NFL players through this union has always given back and we hank you for maintaining this tradition.

He came on board at a critical time, and under his watch and the watch of Troy Vincent, oh, by the way, Troy, Please see Andre about our transition program and we hope you can attend our retired player's convention in May. Our Steering Committee has an opening because Cornelius has a term limitation and must step down for a year...anyway, thanks Troy and thank you to my soon to be new member Matt Stover who has always supported retired players.

And to every else on the staff of the NFLPA for your dedication and support of retired players and retired player programs.

When I speak to kids often the first question I ask them is "Where is the best source for information" Usually the immediate response is the Internet or the newspaper.

Wrong, I tell them. The best place to get information is from your family around the kitchen table.

We are a family and this is our kitchen table...our meetings.

The only thing that makes our family different is the WE decide that we will be in the family. You are not born into this family. You decide whom you will be with and whom you will believe. We are all NFL Players. It does not matter if you are active or retired. You are in this family if you choose to belong.

In the early days of the NFLPA you had to decide to join; decide to participate and decide to pay dues. Still today, each player must decide if they choose to support this union and their union leaders; the officers, player reps and the executive Director who represents all of us; past and present; active and retired.

It is the same today with our retired group. Not all retired players support our Union. I was asked why and I can only speculate...Do they have their own individual agendas? Are they selfish or Greedy like the NFL owners who say they want to take back from the players. Do they work for the NFL?

Or... are they depressed ex-players who were kicked in the head as a player and then kicked to the side of the road after their careers ended?, now old and frustrated looking at this great game they helped to build feeling nobody cares and that the world has passed them by.

Honestly, if you come to the table and get the information and know the facts, one must wonder why would anyone who supports the active Players, especially a former player, would want to publicly attack the NFLPA and help the owners to divide and pull down the only organization that has consistently been there for all players, especially retired players, for over twenty-five years.

I admit this is not an easy question to answer and it remains an enigma to me.

All benefits and help currently available for all retired has come as the result of the sacrifice of past AND present players who sacrificed to obtain the hard fought collective bargaining agreements with the NFL owners.

Until recently, If a former player was in need there was no other place to turn with a guarantee to get help except from our union, the NFLPA and this help that has been there, and hopefully you will permit this help to continue to be there for all retired players and these good acts rarely, if ever, get into the newspaper, on TV or into the blogs on the internet.

Our collective mission in this union must be to get the news out that there is help if you are a former player in need.

If anyone knows of any former player in need please let us know because we have help for those who really need it. We have help but not handouts.

I was player rep for seven years during the seventies representing both the Dallas Cowboys and the Washington Redskins.

It was a scary time to be a pro football player. Don't get hurt the veterans would tell the rookies; Don't get hurt,

In my fifth year I was still jumping for passes that now I know shortened my career. HOF'er and teammate Charlie Taylor who played for 14 years to my 8 said "Jean you have to stop jumping for passes. Don't you know interceptions are a quarterback statistic! How would I know unless somebody told me...somebody I could trust.

When Congressman/Secretary Jack Kemp President of the American Football league and John Mackey President of the National Football league came together as brothers in arms forming what would become this NFLPA.. . This union of players by run by players for players; to negotiate as a union to protect all the players from all the owners, who by the way organized their owners' association long before we organized any players' association

We have gone from having virtually no rights as players to the rights and benefits players, active and retired, have today. The current players are the ones who must negotiate any increase in any benefit or any right for both active and retired players. The owners will not negotiate with retired players. Anything the owners do for retired players will be in accordance with the Collective Bargaining agreement such as the changes in the disability process announced at the last meeting of the Alliance.

That's the way it is; the way it's been and that's the way it always will be. The Child does become the father of man. The active players are the ones who will always care for the retired players.

Let me put it this way. The owners have failed until recently to help retired players and they continue to say, "we gave at the office". Only recently have the owners started to work with the NFLPA on improving benefits for retired players through the Alliance.

Every NFL team or owner; sometimes both, have control of millions of dollars in team or family charities. With all this money, you would think some would go to needy retired players but I know of no such contributions because they say they gave at the office.

The current players have always been with the retired players and as retired players many of us wonder how we can be more supportive. How we can share our experiences so you young guys can make new mistakes and be ready to avoid all the traps we fell into as players when we retired.

The good news is that there is life after football; the challenge however is what quality of life will you and your family enjoy? Will your family stay together? That challenge is up to you.

As for the coming negotiation with the owners, Please don't give back! Do not take our benefits for granted...

Don't take your leadership for granted...your President; your Executive Committee;
Your Player reps

Please please please do not let the media or the Blogs on the Internet divide us

We must stick together because we will be tested just like we have been every time we suit up for a game, every time it was time to negotiate with the owners the toughest group of owners in all of professional sports.

In a fight or a battle, just like a football game; there are always casualties so be prepared and remember you are fighting for us and we will be fighting for you.

We all came from the same place and we must support each other. It's about the dollars. Getting close to eight billion dollars and the owners want to keep it all...they want the 60% back.

We have been severely tested in the past getting to where we are today and it has not been without great sacrifices.

We will again be tested...all of us active and retired players. All retired players were not always with the union. some have never been with this union and crossed picket lines...

In the early days we were warned by the owners not to support this union; not to support your player reps and we risked getting cut.

BUT, in 1974, we made history. We went out on strike and now so you to will be tested.

Even now they try to divide us and they continue to attack us now both active and veteran players under attack.

I want you to leave here knowing that our retired organization supports the active players. Our organization will never attack you accusing you of not taking care of your own because clearly it is just not true.

Tom Landry said, "A team is a chain, only as strong as it's weakest link".

Sid Gilman said "You can score against any defense if you prepare and you execute".

George Allen said, "When a team really comes together they cannot lose!"

True words from my three Hall of Fame Coaches and yet still, I learned even more from my teammates.

Today, I want to thank those veterans that helped me.

